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Celebrate Affordable, Accessible Health Care at Aug. 10 Barbecue

In this day and age of high health-care costs and expectations, it's worth celebrating a place that provides medical, dental, and mental health care to all Lewis and Clark County residents, regardless of their ability to pay.

That's why the Cooperative Health Center (CHC) is inviting the community to help it celebrate National Health Center Week with a free barbecue Wednesday, Aug. 10. The free lunch, catered by Chili O'Brien's, will be served from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. in the parking lot of the health center, 1930 Ninth Ave.

The public also will have an opportunity to meet the staff and tour the facility, which is undergoing renovations. And CHC officials will present the 2011 Public Health Award to a local health-care provider who has shown a commitment to helping the CHC clientele.

The CHC became a federally qualified health center in 1994, which makes it eligible for about \$1 million a year in federal funding. That makes up about a third of the center's total budget, with the rest provided through patient fees, smaller grants, and support from Lewis and Clark County.

In 2010, the center served more than 7,000 patients with almost 23,000 appointments. Forty-four percent of those patients were uninsured.

"We provide care for both short-term and long-term health conditions," said Kate McIvor, CHC director. "We also help educate patients so they can better manage their conditions, and we provide referrals to medical specialists and hospital services."

She noted that the CHC provides a "safety net" for those who are uninsured or who can't afford other medical services.

CHC services are billed on a sliding-fee scale. Patients who have an income under 100 percent of

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the federal poverty level pay \$10 a visit, while those under 200 percent pay on a sliding fee scale.

“Almost two-thirds of our patients fall below that 200 percent threshold,” McIvor said.

The CHC is a component of Lewis and Clark County, but it operates under the guidance of its own board of directors. The center has two satellite clinics: Parker Medical Center in Lincoln, and the Health Care for the Homeless program at God’s Love.

This is the second year the CHC has celebrated National Health Center Week with a public barbecue. The second week of August is set aside each year to recognize the service of community health centers in providing access to affordable, high-quality, cost-effective health care to medically vulnerable and underserved people.

“When people have a place to go for regular health care, they’re going to stay healthier,” McIvor said. “That can help us reduce health-care costs and unnecessary hospitalizations. Ultimately, our staff provides the care our patients need and treats them with the respect they deserve.”

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